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PP RUEHAG RUEHROV
DE RUEHUB #0258/01 0751828
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 161828Z MAR 07
FM USINT HAVANA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1454
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS
RUEHSW/AMEMBASSY BERN 0062
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN 0050
RUMIAAA/USCINCSO MIAMI FL
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RUCOGCA/COMNAVBASE GUANTANAMO BAY CU

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HAVANA 000258

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [CU](#)

SUBJECT: CUBA: HOW BELIEVABLE IS A FIDEL CASTRO COMEBACK?

HAVANA 00000258 001.3 OF 002

Classified By: COM Michael E. Parmly; Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: XXXXXXXXXXXXX
passed us a document March 14 that describes Fidel Castro's declining health, as analyzed by a respected, XXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXX. The document concludes by saying that Castro has a terminal condition, and will suffer an inevitable deterioration of his faculties until he dies. But he is not about to die "immediately." This contrasts with a flurry of news and public statements by key regime figures about Castro making a comeback, including his having spoken to Hugo Chavez on the phone while the latter was in Haiti. We believe that a full comeback is unlikely, but that Fidel Castro is more of a presence behind the scenes -- and even "on stage" as a presence -- than he was a few months ago. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Media have reported increased activity on the part of Fidel Castro this past week: Speaking on the phone to Hugo Chavez during the Venezuelan's visit to Haiti; and receiving Colombian author and long-time sympathizer Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Both Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque (in Europe) and Parliamentary Speaker Ricardo Alarcon stated publicly that Fidel Castro was making a comeback and would return to the GOC's helm. Alarcon's statement included Castro's "winning reelection for president" in 2008. Interim dictator Raul Castro has kept a low profile during the past few weeks.

[1](#)3. (C) XXXXXXXXXXXXX passed COM and Pol-Econ Counselor a document based on XXXXXXXXXXXXX interview with XXXXXXXXXXXXX with an excellent reputation. The

document traces Fidel Castro's critical condition from its onset last July, through the various ups and downs with his local medical staff and with the visiting Spanish doctor, Garcia Sabrido. Most of this repeats what has previously been reported, with one new development: Castro has fired his long-time personal physician, Dr. Selman. Informal translation of this document follows in Para 4.

14. (C) XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX Statement:

"The illness began in the plane from Holguin to Havana (Note: after a full day of July 26, 2006 activities. End note). As this was a short flight there was no doctor aboard and they had to land urgently once they knew of his bleeding. He was diagnosed with diverticulitis of the colon.

This illness is characterized by diverticulae in the large intestine, generally. A diverticula is a protuberant sack in a segment of the intestine, not in itself necessarily dangerous. Waste gets trapped in them, for example. Nevertheless, they can cause hemorrhaging, inflammation and infection, resulting in diverticulitis. (Health Unit Comment: Simple diverticulitis, without perforation, hemorrhaging or infection, is treatable. End Comment.)

The condition requires surgery when the diverticulae are gigantic, because they are more likely to become infected and burst.

He had a perforation in the large intestine and needed to have a colostomy done; which he opposed, saying that they should splice out the infected part and reattach the intestine to his colon. Dr. Selman, who was chief of the medical team, was in agreement, but the rest of the team opposed. But Fidel Castro, capriciously, did not permit the colostomy.

With the passage of time, as the colon was infected, the operation collapsed and the reattached part separated. They had to operate again, but found a fistula. It wasn't known at that time what he had, but normally a fistula in the abdomen has the effect of blocking the digestion of food--resulting in the loss of 40 pounds. They began to feed him by IV serum, and they used a Korean-made device to treat the fistula, which didn't have much success. That was when they called in the Spanish doctor, the one who said that they Cuban team had done what they could, but the correct treatment should have been a colostomy.

At that point they removed Selman from the team, who is now working as a low-level doctor someplace else.

XXXXXXXXXXXX explains that at his (Castro's) age

HAVANA 00000258 002.3 OF 002

this illness is not curable, and will notXXXXXXXXXXXX allow him to return to leading Cuba. He won't die immediately, but he will progressively lose his faculties and become ever more debilitated until he dies."

15. (C) This report is consistent with our reporting that Fidel Castro probably came close to death in July, 2006, and then again around October. Since then, as we have seen in video and audio broadcasts, Castro has been able to engage with Hugo Chavez and others for limited periods of conversation and other forms of carefully controlled activity. He has not appeared live on TV or in any other public context during the entire period of his critical illness, which caused him to miss the September, 2006 Non-Aligned summit and a large-scale celebration of his birthday and armed forces day in December, 2006.

16. (C) Cubans react to news about Fidel Castro with resignation and wild speculation. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX that he thought last month's taped call-in by Castro to Hugo Chavez's radio show was fake and that he would die by May. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

XXXXXXXXXXXX described the Castro illness as having a similar effect on the public as the Pope's 1998 visit: Greatly raised expectation for change, followed by disappointment and reversion to the totalitarian norm.

17. (C) Comment: We are missing too many variables to be able to predict accurately how many more months Fidel Castro will live. Frankly, we don't believe anyone, including Castro himself, can state that with certainty. However, while he is still alive, even in a reduced capacity, his presence has a chilling and retardant effect on Cuban society. The high expectations for change are still out there, but are mostly associated with the idea that the dictator has to die first before anything substantial will happen.
PARMLY